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ABSTRACT

The University of Pennsylvania's Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies introduced a cultural segment into its second language program in 1986 to enable students to use language purposefully within the foreign culture. During the program's 2 years, students are exposed to eight different cultural segments taught by language instructors in cooperation with regular faculty. Because Lauder students are seeking management positions in the international business world, they are competing with their French peers, who are native speakers and highly trained and Lauder emphasizes cultural education at the same level as that of the French counterparts, the "grandes ecoles," so that its graduates have similar knowledge and skills. The language class is where language and culture are joined, by complementing theoretical and historical readings with articles from the contemporary press. For example, two cultural segments in the business course focus on the French automobile industry and francophone colonial culture. Students are required to read a large number of articles, but be personally responsible for analyzing and reporting on only a portion of them. They respond in writing and orally to a variety of questions on cultural issues related to the segment readings. Students also take practice interviews with "grandes ecoles" graduates. (MSE)

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LINKING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PROGRAM OF THE LAUDER INSTITUTE: THE FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

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Marie-Noelle Lahaeye - Lauder Institute

5 April 90

Linking language and culture in the Language and Cultural Program of the Lauder Institute : the French perspective.

The subject of my paper is : Linking language and culture in the Language and Cultural Program of the Lauder Institute : the French perspective.
I have divided this paper into three parts :

First, the evolution of the goals of the Program since the Institute was founded in 1984.

Secondly, the "added value" of the program, defining its specificity in the French section : training Lauder graduates to become as close as possible to their peers in France, graduates from the French grandes ecoles.

And thirdly, the methodology used : using the maximum of materials and resources for maximum information, exploration and expansion. I will give examples.

I.) THE EVOLUTION OF THE GOALS OF THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES PROGRAM.

When the Lauder Institute was founded in 1984, the primary goal of the 601-602 language course was to make the students functional in a professional environment, which at the time translated simply into reaching a Superior on the ACTFL proficiency scale, and since the professional environment was business, it meant integrating business concepts, business activities and business vocabulary to a core course of grammar review and conversation classes centered around economic and business issues.

With the introduction of the cultural segment in the Fall of 1986, the Lauder philosophy came into sharper focus: the goal was no longer merely pragmatic (to make students able to use the language in a purposeful way to achieve a particular result in a specific context), but to make them understand from within how their interlocutors thought, felt and how they apprehended the world. In each language section, native speakers were brought in to give cultural seminars. But what was at work went beyond the teaching of culture, especially in the French section, perhaps because the French are hyper-sensitive to the

nature of discourse. And this leads me into my second part.

II.) LAUDER GRADUATES SPECIALIZING IN FRENCH AND FRENCH GRADUATES FROM THE GRANDES ECOLES.

As I mentioned, French professors teach cultural segments during the two years of the Lauder program : in a fourteen week semester, there are two different cultural courses: seven hour and a half seminars for each cultural course. Which means over these two years, the students are exposed to eight different cultural courses, with eight different cultural seminar professors.

The language instructor serves as the cement that glues these cultural seminars together. He or she is also the only professor the students see on a regular basis in their twenty-four months of study at Lauder. It is therefore important that the language instructor understand exactly the purpose, direction and goals of this curriculum of studies, interpret it for the students, reinforce it for them and make them feel the connection linking the cultural seminars together and linking the cultural seminars with the language sessions.

In other words, the language instructor provides continuity and unity.

The interpretation that the language instructor must provide or reinforce is of such a blunt nature that it tends to be disguised behind the more noble aspirations of learning culture: one tends to speak of the necessity for students : "to be familiar with the current sociopolitical scene, to have an understanding of the historical frame that shapes it, to gain a perspective on the relationship of France to the rest of the world, on France's perception of itself." (Genell Morain : "Foreign Languages and International Trade". University of Georgia Press)

It is what E.D Hirsh calls cultural literacy and it is a valid and fundamental point.

But what is at stake for our students, and particularly (because of the structure of French society) for the students in the French group goes beyond that. It is the unabashed recognition that they are part of an elite and must convince their French peers that they know the codes, ways, manners, reference models of the elite, that they too can use them naturally, easily and purposefully : the elite, in France, are the graduates from the grandes ecoles, l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration,(ENA) l'Ecole

Normale Superieure,(ENS) l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC), l'Ecole Polytechnique (X), all schools requiring a high level of academic schooling, a high degree of general culture, and exceptional skills and talent in the chosen areas of specialization. Being a graduate from a grande ecole, especially the ENA permits rapid access to the higher ranks of a career. You acquire status and power that stay with you through life, a status which allows you to make the crucial decisions that affect the social, political and economic fabric of the system.

The Lauder students seek a position of management in the international business world : management means control, direction and to some extent power. To understand how to use most intelligently and most cleverly the cultural courses offered to them, they must understand how to appropriate culture to make it work for them . Culture will serve to signal complicity with their French peers, which lies deeper than the simple solidarity of shared interests. They must create bonds recalling those of a family, in the sense that "everything predisposes them to get along, to understand one another", or, to use another image, bonds recalling those of a free-masonry,

The students must have a clear understanding of

their identity and role in order to permit a frank assessment of purpose : namely that technical competence is less important than familiarity with the culture of the dominant class and a mastery of the signs and emblems of distinction and taste.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu explains that "like religion in primitive societies, the culture that comes from schooling provides individuals with a common framework of thought which makes communication possible." All the speakers accept, know and have had access to the same fundamental assumptions and every utterance is pressed into service to sustain solidarity within the group. The cultural capital, expressed through speech, through a code which serves to include or to exclude, functions in a way like monetary capital which separates the haves from the have-nots. In learning a foreign language, the students must recognize that acquiring the skill to use and manipulate speech means being initiated into a social institution, one as basic as family and religion, and that, as in family and religion, communication takes place through a ritual kind of expression whose meanings are largely implicit. Those who speak the same language, that is to say, those who recognize the figurative quality of speech, perceive both the

implicit and the explicit metaphorical constructions and can speculate on the ends to which such figures of speech are used. This recognition facilitates multi-layered communication. As sociologist Basil Bernstein explains :

> "It is important to realise that a restricted code carries its own aesthetic. It will tend to develop a metaphoric range of considerable power, a simplicity and directness, a vitality and rhythm; it should not be disvalued. Psychologically, it unites the speaker to his kin and to his local community."

Penetrating that restricted code (one might almost say secret code) is what permits entrance into that restricted world where decisions are made, fundamental issues are weighed and acted upon.

Bourdieu says :

> "Minds patterned in the same way from having been in the same school, are pre-disposed to immediate communication and understanding among themselves. The traditional form of education makes sure that, among all minds, those of a given generation and those of a whole period of history, there is a fundamental homogeneity which makes communication and communion easier... Within a

classical culture, all men share the same treasury of admiration, patterns, rules and above all, of examples, metaphors, images, words, a common idiom. Individuals owe to their schooling, first and foremost, a whole collection of common places, covering not only common speech and language but also areas of encounter and agreement, common problems and common methods of approaching those common problems."

The notions we try to impart to our students are those stressing similarity ("minds patterned in the same way", "fundamental homogeneity", "all men share the same treasury of".) We appeal to the students' sense of efficiency, of "getting results" as they would say, by pointing out that what they are learning is useful in practical as well as symbolic terms, that their learning of culture and the way they learn culture is a tool necessary for professional interaction with the elite for the purpose of recognition of sameness, as a tool of legitimacy and balance in the sharing of power. As Orlando Patteron, the black Harvard historian sociologist puts it:

"The people who run society at the macro level must be literate in this culture. Controlling the levels of power they must acquire literacy in the

wider cultural sense."

The similarity between Lauder students and their counterparts in the Grande Ecole school system stems from the fact that Lauder places great emphasis on "general culture", as the Grandes Ecoles do, and at a sophisticated level (the Lauder students take required courses in history, anthropology, the social sciences). In the French classes (language and culture), they perform exercises regularly and frequently, patterned after the "classes preparatoires" style of exercises ("classes preparatoires" are the preparatory classes to the competitive exam permitting entrance into the Grandes Ecoles) : text summaries, text analysis, oral presentations called "lecons", essays, structuring personal opinions around a certain context and frame, etc).

The graduates of French Grandes Ecoles recognize each other instantly, as they have studied the same body of general knowledge (outside of the more technical areas of specialization) and have been shaped by the same conditioning of intellectual thought-processing. They recognize their kinship and solidarity. Those who have attended two Grandes Ecoles, for example both Polytechnique and ENA can tell immediately an alumnus from X and an alumnus from ENA;

but any graduate from any Grande Ecole will be able to tell when a colleague is also a graduate from a Grande Ecole, as opposed to a university. What we have been trying to do at Lauder is create a similar mould of education designed to promote this helpful feeling of kinship between our graduates and their French colleagues at the highest executive level.

We try to instill into the students the idea that they must project an aura of being endowed with the proper "esprit de corps" : that they have common frames of perception, appreciation, evaluation, thought and action, establishing an automatic connivence of a common well-orchestrated unconscious.

In fact, whether at the executive level or at any level of society, by giving our students keys to understand the complexity of the culture of a foreign country, we are providing them with a sort of "collective unconscious" which permits instantaneous identification and fellowship.

Bourdieu points out :

> "In a society where the handing on of culture is monopolized by a school, the hidden affinities uniting the works of man (and at the same time, modes of conduct and thought) derive from the institution of the school, whose function is

consciously (and also, in part, unconsciously) to transmit the unconscious or, to be more precise, to produce individuals equipped with the system of unconscious (or deeply buried) master-patterns that constitute their culture". "The school transforms the collective heritage into a common individual unconscious."

T.S. Eliot eloquently sums up all the preceding points:

" Intimacy and fellow-feeling, congeniality based on a common culture, are rooted in the unconscious and give the traditional elites a social cohesion and continuity which would be lacking in elites united solely by links of professional interest."

What it amounts to, in psychological terms, is learning how to play on mirror images : displaying the love of oneself in the group one is a part of, to have that love reverberated on to oneself.

Finally, to conclude with this second part of this paper, I will mention the added value of all this training : it is pleasure, a value rarely mentioned in a business context : pleasure, and with it, a heightened and well-justified sense of control and power, coming from knowing your partner's discourse

intimately, understanding where that discourse "comes from", being able to respond to it on its own terms : to the aesthetic component mentioned earlier by Basil Bernstein, one can add the playfulness that comes from the comfortable, secure and smooth mastery of codes.

My third part is about :
III.) METHODOLOGY: USING THE MAXIMUM OF MATERIALS AND RESOURCES FOR MAXIMUM INFORMATION, EXPLORATION AND EXPANSION.

We come back once again to the role of the language instructor as coordinator and liaison in his task to make the cultural segment meaningful (that is integrated into a context.)

One of the language instructor's roles is to train the students into an art refined by the graduates of grandes ecoles: the art of instantaneously mobilizing all available resources to the best advantage.

Another role is to constantly validate and reinforce in the students the necessity of impregnating themselves with French culture and the general culture offered to the French elite; to convince them that it is fundamental that they must learn beyond what they assumed would be necessary to acquire the competence

and skills required for their coveted job and position.

The language class must form a junction between culture and language: one of the ways to achieve this is to complement the more theoretical or historical readings of the cultural segment with contemporary articles from the press, so the students can establish the connection between past and present, the abstract and the concrete, the philosophical and the pragmatic, ideas and their implementation.

Because our students are business students who must be aware of the always rapidly evolving picture of economics and business, because culture is not a static entity but a living notion, and because French intellectuals and French rhetoric figure so prominently in French newspapers, the language class uses the current press as an object of study.

I will give two examples, one related to a cultural seminar course revolving around "French business culture" in which the professor gave an overview of the different sectors of industry, with their current trends and problems, and one whose topic was "The colonial francophone culture".

One of the topics examined in the "French business culture" course was the automobile industry, with special emphasis given to Renault and Peugeot : the

lecture from the cultural segment focused on the historical background of the two competing firms, their diverging economic orientations, their ups and downs on the domestic and foreign market.

One way to integrate this topic with the language class was to provide a nebulous of themes pertaining to specific cultural issues that could be examined and analysed through readings in the current press:

- the role of the state in major French industries
- how two identical sectors of an industry (the automobile industry) fare, one nationalised, the other private.
- immigrant labour in the automobile industry
- the role of unions
- strikes
- CEO's and workers' salaries (one of the major scandals of the fall of 89 was the revelation of the salary of Peugeot's CEO, deemed indecent by the workers and their unions.)
- and more generally, salaries and money in French society
- the outlook of the French automobile industry in the light of 1992.
- car mythology in the French imagination (a comparison with the car in the American

"imaginaire")

At the beginning of the semester, the students are given a bulkpack of readings by the professor teaching the cultural seminar for the cultural segment. The language instructor prepares his own selection of texts to complement the bulkpack from the cultural seminar, thus ensuring that the students will have as comprehensive a picture of the object of study as possible.

The division of work goes as follows : for example, for a bulkpack of seventy articles for the language class, ten articles are assigned per session, for seven sessions. Each student must read the ten texts but is personally responsible for only four. Each week, questions on each section of texts are handed out to the students for the next week. Each student must answer questions (on paper, then to be delivered orally) on four texts. The questions usually comprise summaries, in-depth analyses, interpretation of assertions and quotations, supporting one's personal opinion based on what one has read. This allows all ten articles to be analysed and debated in class without placing too heavy a burden on each individual student.

This method presupposes of course that the

Institute receives many periodicals, since variety of fact presentation, of editorials, of issue emphasis, of rhetoric, is key to understanding the cultural workings at hand. The instructor reads extensively and selects the articles deemed interesting enough to be kept on file: a whole system of files is created over the years, permitting the instructors to put together a bulkpack rapidly. This filing system has the added advantage that when the students prepare for an interview with a French company, they can read the most updated data about that company (name of CEO, the CEO's background and ideas, most recent changes and orientations, etc).

The second example is the exploitation of the topic "Francophone colonial culture" in the language class. The cultural segment focused on the French presence since the seventeenth century in what were then French colonies; the loss of these colonies; the remnants of a French culture in the former colonies; the meaning and significance of the French language in some of these communities; the ambivalent feelings of the former colonies towards France. Seminal texts by Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire written in the fifties were part of the required readings for the students : what the French presence and the French language meant for

black poets, black intellectuals, black politicians.

The language class bulkpack relating to this theme is divided into two sections : Immigration and Francophonie.

The Immigration part includes articles on :

- presence of immigrants in France (and Europe). Statistics, legal status and rights.
- the concept of nationality and how to acquire it
- popular attitudes towards immigrants and particularly maghrebins.
- portraits of immigrant communities in France
- the fate of those who return to their country of origin.
- politicians and immigrants
- immigrants in the work force
- immigrants and controversies :
- the islamic scarf worn in school, defying the laique (secular) principle instituted by Jules Ferry.
- the construction of an islamic Mosque in Lyons

The Francophonie part includes :

- interviews of the officials, by those in charge of protecting, controlling, spreading the French language in other cultures.

- franglais : is it or not a problem ?

- the language of advertising and how it affects language in general

- the language of youth

- French as it is taught in schools today. (are there dictations, grammatical analyses, memorization of poems, etc ? and how do these exercises shape the relation of the French person to his language ?)

- the evolution of the French language : should it be regulated and regimented in any way ?

As you can see, there is a constant to and fro movement between themes : the wider and deeper the focus, the more chance to achieve a comprehensive picture, linking past and present, abstract and concrete, the more chance to finally read the culture from within, giving the students all the necessary tools to communicate on the same level, on the same wave length as their French peers: they know the facts, the rhetoric; they know which issues are important and why and how the right and the left deal with them. They have lost their naivete ("What's the big deal?" asked one student confronted with a series of editorials on the islamic scarves in public schools last fall) and some of their arrogance : a tendency to

always look at problems from an American point of view and to try to solve it (when they are asked only to understand it) using the American standard as the model to imitate, without any sensitivity to the specificity of cultural problems.

A sort of synthetic exercise that has been implemented in the French program of Lauder is to have the students take practise professional interviews with French Wharton students who are alumni of French Grandes Ecoles and have experience working in the French business world. The test is like a final rite of passage designed not only to prepare the students for real interviews with French companies but to evaluate how much they have learned in the ways to communicate with their French counterparts. All the skills practised during the two years at Lauder are put to the test : language skills of course; knowledge about French companies and French culture; the way to answer or elude trick questions; the way to promote oneself as one of the elite.

The efforts we put into raising the consiousness of students on the importance of being intimately aware of cultural issues seems to have paid off if one considers the positive results our students meet with when they interview for internships in French companies. I will

let my students have the final word as they comment on these interviews. Most report not being asked any technical questions or questions on their professional backgrounds. One of them said : "In the U.S, 99% of the questions are predictable. In France, any question can come up, but in my experience, they like to ask questions about current events, asking us to more or less editorialize them, by placing them in the context of French culture." Another says: "In my resume, among other things I mentioned my interest in art and music. The interviewer focused much of the interview on my artistic tastes and asked me what my opinion was about the interference of the State in artistic matters." A third reports : "My interviewer seemed bored with the interview until I mentioned I had spent several months in Biarritz. He lit up on that and asked me questions about life in the French province, and if I had any opinions about minority languages such as the basque language and what minority languages meant culturally and politically." A fourth, who was obviously familiar with Montaigne summed it all up in these words: "In these interviews, what the interviewers want to see if that we are accepted by French society, or rather by a certain class of French society and that the way to project that is to show that we don't have "une tete

about centralisation vs decentralisation (par 2)

bien pleine mais [redacted] bien faite." MNL